



7/21/10 EQB Hearing at Tunkhannock: Public: Regs not strong enough

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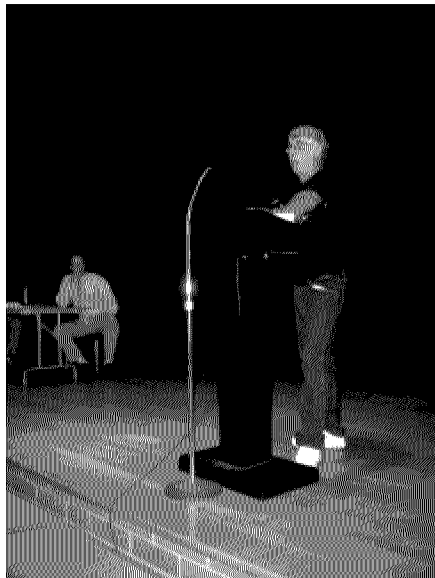
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Note: Patrick Henderson is an aide to State Seator Mary Jo White

Public: Regs not strong enough

BY wceditor 21 July 2010 No Comment



Eaton Township Supervisor Paul Rowker offers his comments at the Environmental Quality Board hearing, with Senate staff member Patrick Henderson listening in the background. STAFF PHOTO/MIKE RUDOLF

BY MICHAEL J. RUDOLF

Wyoming County Press Examiner

TUNKHANNOCK - Residents from four counties offered comments Monday night at a hearing

on proposed regulations of the natural gas industry.

Of the more than 100 people who attended the Environmental Quality Board session at Tunkhannock Area Middle School, about two dozen gave their opinions. Everyone who spoke was in favor of stronger regulations.

“You must make the industry believe that Pennsylvania will not stand for anything less than the highest standards,” said Victoria Switzer of Dimock Township.

Patrick Henderson, executive director of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, was the sole official from Harrisburg listening to the testimony. He explained that all of the comments, plus those submitted in writing, would be reviewed by the committee as it continues work on the regulations.

For more than two hours, residents voiced their concerns about the effect gas drilling in general and the hydrofracturing process in particular has had and will continue to have on the environment.

“The process of fracking has many critical flaws,” said Craig Stevens of Silver Lake Township.

Stevens said currently there is little or no information about the chemicals used by gas companies in the process. He speculated that there could be widespread damage to the aquifer.

“What happens if you ruin the water for an entire community?” he wondered.

Stevens likened the possibility of damage from a single gas well to the BP oil spill.

“Nobody thought we could ruin the Gulf of Mexico with one well. Maybe we should slow down,” he said.

Many of those who spoke urged the state Department of Environmental Protection to halt all gas drilling until more information about the process is available.

“Our water’s not something we should play Russian Roulette with,” said Angela Seyler of Noxen.

“Hydraulic fracturing of the Marcellus shale cannot be conducted safely at this time,” added Virginia Cody of Factoryville, a member of the Gas Drilling Awareness Coalition.

Cody also suggested that the gas companies be charged permit fees comparable in percentage to what homeowners are assessed for building permits, about five percent of the cost. At an estimated \$5 million per well, that would create a sizable impact on the gas companies.

Another who called for shutting down all drilling operations was Joanne Fiorito of Tunkhannock Township.

“I am in favor of a complete moratorium, because there is currently no sound science by this industry that has been reviewed,” said Fiorito, a member of the group Citizens for Clean Water.

Craig Sautner of Dimock Township came forward carrying a bottle of water from his home that he said was contaminated by a nearby drilling operation.

"I'm hoping this is going to scare a lot of people, because this could happen to your well," he said.

Sautner stated that even the water treatment system the gas company has provided for his home has negatively impacted his family's health.

"This is America, for crying out loud. We shouldn't have to live like this. What they did to us is really criminal," Sautner said.

"I can live without gas. I can't live without water," he continued.

A number of people wanted to make sure that whatever regulations are put in place, they are enforced.

"DEP moves way too slow. The fracking operation should have never started," added William Ernest of Tuscarora Township.

John Rothschild of Harveys Lake said he doesn't trust the gas companies and their assurances that the operations are safe.

"They are people who extract from the earth without regard for the surroundings, without regard for the people," Rothschild said. "These are companies who will cheat and avoid every possible enforcement of the rules."

Others from Luzerne County said they face a very different concern than their neighbors to the north, because they get their water from public supplies.

Michelle Thomas of Hunlock Creek said her biggest fears come from natural gas leases signed by residents who live along Huntsville Reservoir and other water sources.

"How can you let them sign leases on the shore of a reservoir that serves 100,000 people?" Thomas asked.

Public officials were also present at the hearing.

Eaton Township supervisor Paul Rowker said he was not only concerned about drilling, but also water treatment facilities for fluids removed from the wells.

He said regulations on drilling should have been put in place long ago.

"We're letting them go and we're trying to reel them in," Rowker said.

State Sen. Lisa Baker, R-Lehman Township, decided to defer making public comment so that others could have the time. She said she would be submitting a written opinion to the committee.

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